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ABSTRACT

Small schools have been slow to respond to changing societal needs because (1) of their isolation, geographically and otherwise; (2) their smallness leaves little flexibility to innovate and explore; (3) staffing patterns are aimed at recruitment from within the community; and (4) information and communication is focused on the localite rather than on cosmopolite sources. The purposes of the Task Force for Small Schools in Tennessee are to: (1) identify and create awareness of needs, problems, and priorities of small schools in Tennessee; (2) define and initiate changes in preparing programs for professional education personnel which recognize the needs, problems, and priorities of small schools; (3) develop and implement strategies for in-service improvement of school programs and lay leadership in Tennessee small schools; and (4) generate research related to needs, programs, and processes. Using similar projects as guides, the Task Force's goals are: broader and higher quality academic and vocational curricula; changed instructional organization; and improvement of teaching and administration through in-service education. The educational needs of students and schools in rural settings are discussed. The following are also covered: political climate, student achievement and drop-outs, financial support, an analysis of school districts, and 3 attempted educational changes in rural schools. (NQ)

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION TASK FORCE FOR SMALL SCHOOLS IN TENNESSEE *

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Introduction

Public schools in general have been slow to adopt new ideas and innovations. Much of this failure is inherent in the very organization and control of public schools. Much of it can be attributed to the inability of public school staff to maintain current knowledge about new educational practices and to a reward system which does not encourage or promote change. Simply stated, teachers and administrators of the public schools lack time and motivation for becoming involved in the identification and solution of basic problems. It is evident that the public schools need assistance in these endeavors if for no other reason than the fact that the dissemination of educational ideas and innovations has been unbearably slow. But more importantly, the past history of reluctance or inability to change on the part of the public school cannot continue in the present mode if this institution is to perform a significant role in a dynamic, pluralistic, rapidly changing society.

Small schools, because of their isolation (geographically and otherwise), because much flexibility to innovate and explore is lost in their smallness, because staffing patterns have tended toward recruitment from within the community, because information and communication has focused upon localite rather than cosmopolite sources, because of these and many other factors small schools have been very slow to change in response to changing societal needs.

Purposes

The purposes of this project are:

1. To identify and create awareness of needs, problems, and priorities of small schools in Tennessee;

2. To define and initiate changes in preparation programs for professional education personnel which recognize the needs, problems, and priorities of small schools;

3. To develop and implement strategies for in-service improvement of school programs and lay leadership in Tennessee small schools; and

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4. To generate research related to the needs, programs, and processes.

Review of the Literature

Small schools, particularly small high schools, have been the center of controversy for many years. In the last two decades considerable effort has been directed toward reorganization and consolidation of small school districts into larger districts. Larger districts are reportedly more sound economically and can offer a better educational program. This effort has been only partially successful. A substantial number of small schools remain and are faced with problems of inadequate facilities for specialized courses, lack of finances, low teachers' salaries, too few students to justify the offering of advanced classes, and teachers who are forced to teach three or more subjects daily, frequently outside their area of preparation.

The fact is, however, that many small schools do exist and serve a substantial number of students. Geographical isolation, sparse population, long distances and poor roads cause one to conclude that many small schools are destined to exist for some time. The problem becomes one, the solution of which takes us beyond the combining of school districts to achieve a larger grouping of pupils, toward an internal reorganization of the small school itself.

In efforts to cope with these and other problems of small schools several small schools projects were launched in the 1960's. Common to their operational procedures was the combining of teaching staffs from several schools for the purpose of curriculum development.

The Catskill Area Project in Small School Design was one such project. It had two prime objectives: (1) The development of actual practices which are immediately useful to the improvement of education; and (2) the development of fundamental concepts essential to basic changes in the internal organization of small schools.[5] The project served schools varying in enrollment from 250 to 1,100 pupils in a tri-county area in New York State's upper Catskill Mountain Region.[6] Recommendations from this project suggest flexible scheduling, supervised correspondence study, school aides, multiple classes (two or more different subjects taught in

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[5]National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards, Changes in Teacher Education: An Appraisal (Official Report of the Columbus Conference, Eighteenth National T.E.P.S. Conference), Frank W. Cyu, "Implications of the Catskill Area Project in Small School Design for Teacher Education." Washington, D. C.; National Education Association, 1964), p. 39.

[6]Ibid., p. 380.

the same room at the same time and by the same teacher), staff versatility, greater use of technology, shared services, emphasis on multi-purpose facilities designed to serve small numbers of students, and teacher in-service education.[7]

Another project of a similar nature serving five states (Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico and Utah) was the Western States Small Schools Project. The project organizers stated five assumptions about small schools which served as guidelines for their efforts.

These were:

1. The isolated small schools will continue to educate significant numbers of children.

2. Rural education needs special research and development attention to determine uniqueness and similarities when compared with the extant programs in the cities.

3. Solutions proposed for urban and suburban schools are not always applicable or susceptible to direct transfer to rural areas.

4. There are some inherent potential strengths in smallness that have not been analyzed adequately to justify inferences for all of education.

5. Extensive school district reorganization and changing state support formulas, although necessary prerequisites to improved quality, are not of themselves sufficient guarantees that isolated schools will offer excellent and comprehensive educations for all the children.[8]

The goals of this project were:

1. Broader and higher quality academic and vocational curricula.

2. Changed organization for instruction.

3. Improvement of teaching and administration through in-service education.[9]

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[7]Ibid., pp. 381-388.

[8]Ralph Bohrson and Rowan Stutz, "Small School Improvement: Urban Renewal Begins in the Country," NASSP Bulletin, 50:56, February, 1966.

[9]Ibid.

Bohrson and Stutz suggested that:

> "Because of lack of supervisory service, remoteness from college campuses, and the infrequency of contact with state departments of education, small schools tended to operate as they had in the 1890's. They were generally slow in adopting new educational practices. However, the regional effort seems to be a partial answer to the problem. The distance between the idea and the small schools' adoption seems shorter in the WSSSP states. [10]

Curricula areas which have received developmental support from the Project include such practices as mobile service, personalized curriculum, independent study, individual and small group instruction, team teaching, learning laboratories, imaginative use of educational technology, and better marking and reporting procedures. Hopefully, these are being blended into an instructional design.

The Texas Small Schools Project had as its focus in-service for teachers, curriculum guide development, forum meetings, opportunities for contact with consultants and personnel from other public schools, college professors and other resource people, and meetings for demonstrations of new instructional materials. A prime organizational factor in this project was the regional grouping of schools for cooperative curriculum development. [11]

A relatively recent project, The West Virginia Special Needs Project, had as its purpose to learn more about how to work effectively with low-income, rural, non farm groups. The three test communities had not had experience with Extension activities. Programs in early childhood education, health, recreation and community development were introduced.

The major conclusion of this evaluation study was that the project demonstrated that organizational structures can be created, new services delivered, and educational work can be carried on by Extension in low-income rural communities. [12]

An EPDA Project carried out in rural Southern Indiana and reported by the University of Indiana was concerned basically with improving teacher

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[10] Ibid., p. 57.

[11] Charles T. Bitters, "Quality and Variety in Texas Small Schools," NASSP Bulletin, 50: pp. 63-64, February, 1966.

[12] Miller, Robert W. and Others, "Approaches to University Extension Work with the Rural Disadvantaged: Description and Analysis of a Pilot Effort," West Virginia Univ., Morgantown, West Virginia Center for Appalachian Studies and Development, August 1972.

effectiveness in small rural schools. The project was based upon a training-consultation model and moved toward a change production model. Consultation and use of teams as training units and as mechanisms for producing change in schools was the primary focus of the project. The following observations from the Report could be useful:

> "The impact of the external consultant team greatly depends on the degree to which the consultant team can expand its membership to include persons of the school system from various sub groups (teachers, administrators, students, parents) in planning, goal setting, and action step planning."[13]
>
> "Rural community leaders, teachers, principals, superintendents and school board members usually represent the community sentiments with great accuracy, and if removed, they in all likelihood will be replaced by persons with similar values".
>
> "A broad base of support is required for initiating and maintaining significant educational changes in rural schools. This suggests that school consultants need to also include school board and community members in their consultation".
>
> "Providing feedback to teachers or other target groups being evaluated is very important. Few things are as disconcerting as having someone collect data, observe classes, or gather any type of information for undisclosed purposes, the results of which are never shared".

Each of these projects had prime objectives of dissemination of new educational ideas, helping public schools identify curricula concerns, and providing specialized assistance in problem solving, innovation, and adoption of innovations to a particular school situation.

As a result of these and other similar projects only one outcome with broad implications appears to have resulted - the movement toward regional sharing of services and programs. No new in-service or pre service education models for the training of teachers and administrators have resulted which have demonstrated their effectiveness; no new, innovative, more effective strategies for dissemination of information are in evidence; little or no research exists related to small schools, their needs and problems, and potential solutions. In fact, there seems to be less activity of the nature just mentioned today and as related to small schools than there was a decade ago. Yet the small schools and problems related to them remain and are destined to remain for many years unless activities related to solution of the many problems of small schools are heightened.

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[13]Anastasiow, Nicholas J., editor, "Schools in Crisis -- Models for Renewal," Viewpoints, Bulletin of the School of Education, Indiana University, 48-6, November, 1972.

Studies of Educational Need in Rural Appalachia. Needs studies conducted in Appalachia are remarkable in their similarity. They generally reveal the need for:

1. Basic skill development (including reading, listening, spelling, written expression).

2. Career-vocational development.

3. Early childhood education.

At least four of the needs studies identified improved attitude toward school as a priority need.[14] (The writer interprets this to include total community attitudes toward both program and operational aspects of schools.) Three of the studies reported adult and continuing education.[15] Improved leadership for education is a topic of concern mentioned in four of the studies.[16] These three areas of need seem to represent causes rather than symptons of the very most basic problems or needs of Appalachia. A program aimed at the solution of these vary basic problems seems mandatory as a prerequisite for solution of the more specific problem areas. Out of such a solution of these basic problems should grow an awareness on the part of the community of the specific program needs as well as a climate conducive to problem solving and new program developments.

Needs studies are helpful in identifying problems; however, to make the transition between a needs study and a new program requires what might be identified as a "cognitive leap." One must ask such questions as "what program(s) will make a long-range impact on the problems identified?" "What is the priority program?" Two particular groups were asked questions closely related to the two posed here, the "AEL Experts" and the AEL Membership.

The AEL Expert Opinion Survey ranked "need for changing attitudes within and about Appalachia" and "need for educational leadership, all facets" as the number one and two problems respectively, within the next five years. They also reported "need for a new or changed organization of the system, political and instructional" (number four), "need for continuing and adult education" (number nine) as priority problems to be solved.[17]

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[14]Campbell, M. C., Directions for Educational Development in Appalachia, Appalachia Education Laboratory, Inc. (Charleston, West Virginia) pp. 5, 27, 41, 49.

[15]Ibid., pp. 41, 49.

[16]Ibid., pp. 5, 19, 41, 49.

[17]Ibid., pp. 43, 44.

The AEL Membership, with more than two-hundred persons participating, produced a list of seven educational development needs. These include:

> A pattern for community schools, involving programs of educational experience for all members of the family developed out of resources provided by representatives of education, industry, business; based on shared studies of the needs of the area. (Selected by ten groups.)
>
> To develop a structure and operation which would put into effect the innovative programs (already developed by AEL and others), focusing on communicative skills.
>
> A system for the development of self-respect among pupils and interpersonal respect between pupils.
>
> Improved models for improved communications between school-community agencies and between teachers-administrators and school-home.
>
> A process or program to bring about attitudinal change among the groups of administrators, teachers, parents, students and others involved in and with education.
>
> Home intervention in education from prenatal on, with a multi-disciplinary approach--medical, social--educational and environmental which would involve retraining of teachers to deal with real problems of Appalachia to significantly change parents and students.
>
> A program to provide worthwhile learning experiences to individuals-in and out of schools--devising model organizational structures in which these things can happen, including improved communications, climates for changes, with stress on attitudinal changes.[18]

What all of this suggests then is simply that any attempt to change the educational scene in rural Appalachia, without concurrent efforts to affect change of the social, economic, and political areas of community life, will have very limited impact. Educational institutions, especially in rural Appalachia, interact with all other institutions in a community. Recognition of this simple fact certainly suggests the need for a very different approach to educational change; that is, if the change is to be significant, lasting, and contemporary.

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[18] Ibid., pp. 50-51.

Need for Small Schools Task Force

The following discussion represents only a surface overview statement of the educational needs of students and schools in rural settings. It is intended to cause the reader to raise questions and become more aware of some of the needs of small schools. Included in the discussion are the topics of political climate, student achievement and drop-out, financial support, an analysis of school Districts in Tennessee, and three case reports of attempted educational change in rural schools.

Political Realities. Education does not function in isolation or in a vacuum from the society it serves. Perhaps more than in an urban or suburban setting, the decisions made about the schools (especially staffing and budgetary decisions but also programmatic decisions) in small, rural communities are so closely controlled by the political power structure that to attempt to improve public education without concurrent efforts to change the "life space" in which public schools and public school officials must operate is something akin to an exercise in futility.

The rural community is a politically oriented community with the primary goal of such politics being an economic one. Schools in rural communities are by far the biggest business in said community. Control of the school budget and staffing decisions then is a major goal in this power-economic struggle.

Coupled with this strong economic motive for control of the schools is the fact that most of the community leadership is somewhat limited in its perceptions about quality schools. The community has few outsiders settling there. In fact, the migration is outward with the youth who leave the community for a college education or outside employment frequently leaving for good. Most of the teachers and school administrators are indeed "home grown" products. Within an environment where perceptions are limited there is little acceptance or interest in special programs intended to improve the educational program. Figures revealing reading problems, high drop-out rates, high illiteracy, etc. mean little or nothing. The basic problems, stated as questions include: How can the perceptions of the community leader be broadened in order that he can understand the need for and be willing to support change in the local schools?" "How can attitudes be changed so that the long-range development of the community through support of public education can become reality?" "How can values be reoriented in order that quality education can become the goal rather than use of school monies and staff positions as a part of the community rewards system for relatives or to support partisian politics?"

These are the paramount problems in rural Tennessee, for without their solution all other problems and program development thrusts to resolve them will become subservient to the political-economic realities of the region.

School Districts in Tennessee. In the following analysis, school districts in Tennessee are divided into six groups according to student enrollments.

Table I indicates that there are 146 school districts in Tennessee with 39,174 teachers, 918 central administrators and 932,436 students. Ninty-six of these school districts have 4,999 or fewer students and will be classified as "small schools" for the purposes of this task force. These ninty-six small school districts (66 percent of the state's total) have 8,634 teachers (22 percent of the state's total), 288 central administration (31 percent of the state's total), and 215,326 students (23 percent of the state's toatl).

TABLE I.

AN ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN TENNESSEE BY NUMBERS OF TEACHERS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND STUDENTS, 1972-73

Size	# of Districts	% of total	% of teachers	% of total	# of Central Administrators	% of total	# of Students	% of total
20,000 +	7	5	17,387	44	332	36	389116	42
10,000-19,999	6	4	3,355	9	64	7	82644	9
5,000- 9,999	37	25	9,762	25	234	25	245350	26
2,500- 4,999	43	30	6,210	16	159	17	150324	16
1,000- 2,499	30	21	2,073	5	93	10	50498	5
0- 999	23	16	387	1	36	4	14504	2
TOTALS	146	100	39,174	100	918	100	932436	100

What should be emphasized here is that approximately one-fourth of this State's students are currently attending school in small rural schools which are geographically isolated. The professional staff to be served numbers almost 9,000, a significant number which has been virtually unserved by existing inservice models and emphasis. The case is made elsewhere in this concept paper for the extreme needs of the students and schools in this size category.

Local District Finance in Tennessee. For purposes of analysis counties, including all school districts in each, were classified into six groups according to student enrollments.

Table II shows that most counties in the state of Tennessee have available, on a per pupil in ADA basis, $4,000 to $10,000 in assessed valuation. Only eight districts have an assessed value per pupil of more than $10,000. Five districts with enrollments of 5,000 or fewer must provide local support with per pupil assessed valuation of less than $4,000.

TABLE II

ASSESSED VALUATION PER PUPIL IN ADA
BY COUNTY* - TENNESSEE

Assessed Valuation per pupil in ADA	ENROLLMENTS 20,000+	10,000 to 19,999	5,000 to 9,999	2,500 to 4,999	1,000 to 2,499	0 to 999
$20,000 +					1	
15,000-19,999						
10,000-14,999	2		2	2	1	
7,000- 9,999	3	5	9	9	5	1
4,000- 6,999		7	20	12	7	1
1,000- 3,999		1	1	2	2	1

*Data obtained from State Board of Equalization, State of Tennessee, Freeley B. Cook, Director, December 15, 1972.

It is important to remember 45 of the States 95 counties enroll less than 5,000 pupils. In 25 of this group of counties there is less than $7,000 per pupil available in assessed valuation which means that a local rate of $2.00/$100.00 would raise only $140.00 or less per pupil. Carried further and applying the same rate, in five of the small enrollment districts $80.00 or less in local money would be available for each student.

Six enrollment groups were used as the basis for analyzing local current expenditures in school districts in Tennessee.

Table III identifies that among the school systems which enrolled fewer than 5,000 in grades K-12, only two supplemented state funds with more than $300 per pupil. Eleven of these school systems added between $200 and $300 per pupil to funds supplied by the state while 32 of the schools spent less than $100 per pupil above state allottments. Between $100 and $200 per pupil was the local supplement used by the largest number of school systems, however, the range among these school systems was from $4.45 to $336.52. Of the 44 school systems in the state which supplemented state funds at less than the $100 per pupil level 32 were found to enroll fewer than 5,000 students.

TABLE III

LOCAL CURRENT EXPENDITURES PER PUPIL IN ADA 1970-71 BY SCHOOL SYSTEM AND ENROLLMENT - TENNESSEE*

Local Current Expend/Pupil in ADA	Enrollments						
	20,000+	10,000 to 19,999	5,000 to 9,999	2,500 to 4,999	1,000 to 2,499	0 to 999	Totals
$300 or more	2		3	1	1		7
200 to 299	5		1	5	4	2	17
100 to 199		6	21	26	15	21	89
99 or less			12	12	10	10	44

*Data compiled from Rankings of the School Systems in Tennessee, 1972. Research Bulletin 1972 - R8.

Emphasis here relates to the fact local supplement in 94 of the districts which enrolled fewer than 5,000 pupils was found to be less than $200 per pupil. All but 12 of the state's districts which supplemented state funds with less than $100 per pupil were found in small districts.

Drop-Out Rate By County. Analysis of these data was based on six enrollment categories.

Table IV indicates that forty-five counties, each with one or more school systems, enrolled fewer than 5,000 in grades K-12. Twenty-three of these counties were identified to have a three-year average drop-out rate of 50% or higher and in thirteen counties the rate was below 40. About two-thirds of this group of counties equalled or exceeded the state average of 43%.

TABLE IV

DROP-OUT RATE BY COUNTY
THREE-YEAR AVERAGE*

(State of Tennessee Average 43.0%)

Drop-Out Rate 3 yr. Average	Enrollment 20,000+	10,000 to 19,999	5,000 to 9,999	2,500 to 4,999	1,000 to 2,499	0 to 999
70% or more			1	1	1	
60-69%		1	3	3	5	
50-59%			4	7	2	2
40-49%	2	6	12	8	3	
30-39%	3	4	11	5	5	1
20-29%		2	1	2		

*Data was obtained from "Selected Data for Educational Planners." Compiled by Gary Q. Green for Tennessee Research Coordinating Unit for Vocational Education, January 1973.

Important information coming from these data includes the fact that all but thirteen of the districts enrolling fewer than 5,000 pupils have a drop-out rate of more than 40% and this rate is a three-year average. The average drop-out rate in fifteen counties exceeds 60%.

Level Of Educational Attainment. Table V gives a summary of the educational attainment levels of citizens who reside in communities of 15,00 and less as compared with those in communities of 15,001 and more, as well as averages for the total state. In smaller communities 79.9 per cent of the people had less than a high school diploma; in larger communities in Tennessee 54 per cent of the people had high school diplomas. Thirty-three per cent of the people in small communities had less than an eighth grade education as compared with 21.1 per cent in large communities.

TABLE V

SUMMARY, BY POPULATION, OF LEVEL OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT*

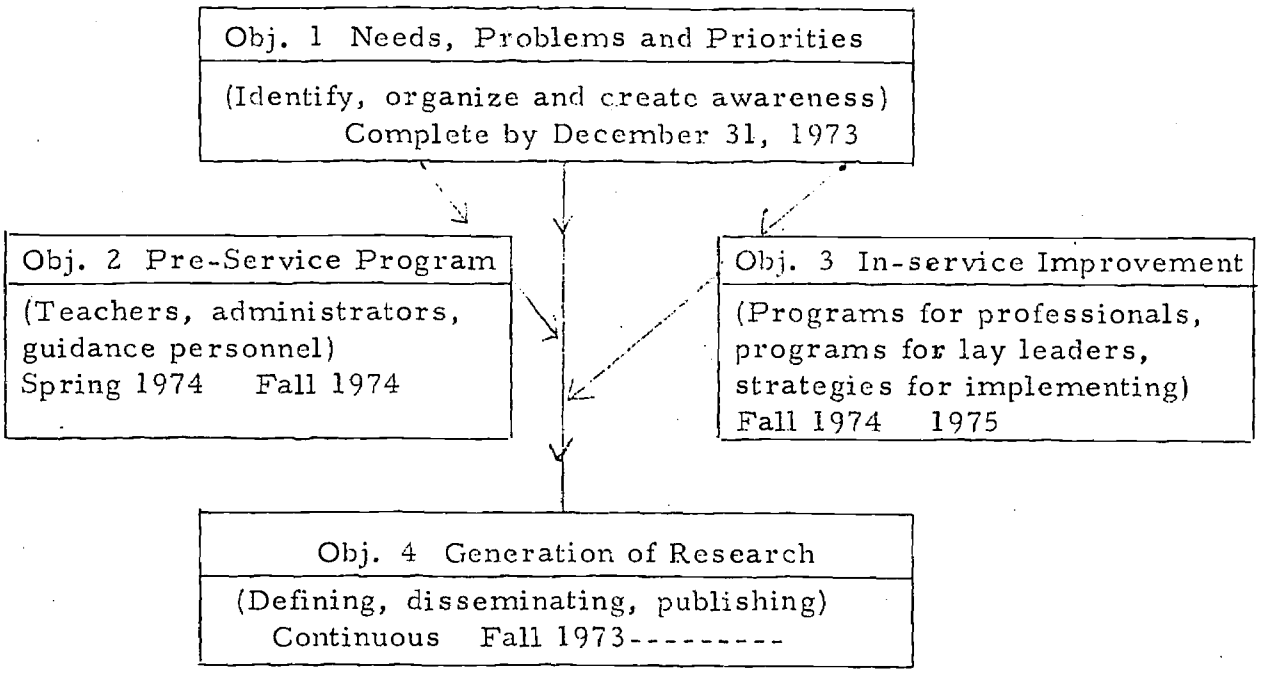
	TOTAL POPULATION**	LESS THAN 8TH GRADE	PERCENT OF TOTAL POPULATION	# WITH 8TH GRADE BUT LESS THAN 12TH GRADE	PERCENT OF TOTAL POPULATION	TOTAL WITH LESS THAN 12TH GRADE	PERCENT OF POPULATION
15,000 & Less	504,716	166,580	33.0	196,191	38.9	362,773	79.9
15,001 & More	1,623,230	342,046	21.1	534,697	32.9	876,741	54.0
TOTAL	2,127,946	508,626	23.9	730,888	34.3	1,239,514	58.2

*U. S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Population: 1970, General Social and Economic Characteristics, Final Report PC(1)-C44 Tennessee, U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., 1972, p. 44-179.

**All reference to total population refers to the total population of adults 25 years of age and older.

Time Projections

Target dates for each of the stated objectives are outlined below.



Strategies

Development of interest in and awareness of needs, problems and priorities important to the small, rural oriented, school or school system requires joint involvement of professionals and lay leaders with university and state leadership personnel. Such joint involvement could come to be accomplished with a conference designed to bring people together by invitation. The sponsoring institution would be the College of Education. Outcomes expected from such a conference include: (1) a statement of needs, problems and priorities of small schools; (2) definitions of procedures and strategies for instituting and carrying out the "Task Force" program; (3) lists of agencies, school units and personnel and university personnel from which participants for the task force steering committee can be obtained. This task force steering committee, utilizing the information generated in the Small Schools Conference, will then design an overall plan of action.

Summary

The primary objectives of this Task Force will be to identify needs and priorities of small schools in Tennessee, to provide leadership for the development of pre and in-service education programs for small school personnel and to generate research related to the small school.

There is a significant number of small schools in Tennessee, serving a large number of students. These small schools will continue to exist, for the most part into the forseeable future. It is hypothesized that these schools have received little support in the past from federal or state agencies, and that they, of all the school districts are least able to initiate self renewal.

In final analysis there are ninty-six small school districts in Tennessee which in all likelyhood need assistance they are not currently receiving. The primary focus of this Task Force, then, is to attempt to determine what help they need most and by what process that help can be most effectively delivered.

*Paper prepared for the Small Schools Invitational Conference, Montgomery Bell State Park, Dickson, Tennessee, November 29-30, 1973.